

1615 New Hampshire Avenue NW  
First Floor  
Washington, DC 20009-2520  
USA

Telephone 202 628 8410  
Fax 202 628 8419

Washington Office

# ALA American Library Association

July 8, 2013

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Re: ConnectED Initiative and E-rate program

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of our 58,000 members across the country, I am writing to express our great thanks and appreciation to you for including libraries in the ConnectED Initiative. As you recognized in your address in Mooresville, North Carolina, libraries are absolutely essential to ensuring that America's students have ready access to high-speed internet services no matter where they live and no matter what their stage of learning. The American Library Association (ALA) and our nation's libraries strongly support internet-based learning by K-12 students, home schooled students, and those pursuing their GED.

We agree that there is a direct link between high-quality K-12 education, economic development, and global competitiveness. Libraries all over the country have been upgrading their technology, providing training, and developing internet-based content and applications to ensure that our students are prepared to meet the challenges in today's information economy. Together, libraries and schools are committed to providing all learners with personalized educational opportunities both in school and outside of school.

Libraries promote innovative, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. For example, Chicago Public Library's YOUMedia or The Labs at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh offer young people an opportunity to produce rich, multi-media products using the latest technology tools while connecting these learning experiences directly back to school and careers. Such experiences foster creativity and develop critical thinking skills that are integral to long-term achievement. Digital learning labs are not confined to large urban libraries, however. The Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, provides a maker space to encourage innovation, and the Howard County Public Library in Maryland houses a Learning Lab to engage young adults in using new and emerging media and technology. Almost every library around the country provides wireless internet access to students (who often bring their own devices to libraries after school) and the general public at no charge. In addition, libraries support distance learning and continuing education for college and adult students.

Furthermore, libraries have been on the front lines during the economic recession providing the public with digital literacy training and free internet access so that people may search for and apply for jobs, learn new skills, and start their own internet-based businesses. Sixty-two percent of libraries nationwide [report offering](#) the only no-fee computer and internet access in their communities. Libraries are uniquely important because they provide internet access to *all* residents in the communities they serve.

All of these services are enabled by the E-rate program. The E-rate program is the most critical technology funding source for public libraries; in fact, the E-rate program fuels libraries' expanding and innovative digital services.

Unfortunately, libraries are having a difficult time acquiring the broadband technologies that they need to keep up with the demand for internet-based services. Libraries are confronting a tidal wave of high-bandwidth applications: 41 percent of libraries reported that their connectivity was inadequate to meet patron demand in 2012, and this problem is likely to grow more severe in the near future. In 2013 E-rate applicants requested \$4.98 billion – almost double the amount of funding available. This is a long-term trend that shows no sign of diminishing.

The E-rate program has been enormously valuable, enabling libraries and schools to acquire telecommunications and broadband infrastructure at affordable rates for many years. But, to meet the continually shifting digital demands of the future, the E-rate program must be strengthened and resourced to prepare students of all ages and abilities to develop the skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century marketplace. We cannot allow inadequate bandwidth to limit what our students and workers can achieve. We support your recognition of the critical role played by libraries and schools in preparing our nation to meet the challenges of the future through the ConnectED Initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Sheketoff". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Emily Sheketoff  
Executive Director  
ALA Washington Office

cc: The Honorable Mignon Clyburn, Acting Chairwoman, Federal Communications Commission  
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission  
The Honorable Ajit Pai, Commissioner, Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission  
The Honorable Arne Duncan, Secretary, U.S. Department of Education